

The Athenian Mercury



Quest. 1. **W**Hat kind of Being the Souls of Abortive Infants are — Whether they have any more than a Vegetative Soul, — Since as soon as the Breath has left an Animal 'tis granted the Soul is fled, & contra it seems, before a Creature breaths it is not present. Adam was but a Lump of Matter before he Breathed, God Breathing into his Nostrils the Breath of Life, before he became a Living Soul. Without Breath there cannot be Life, & where there never was Life how can there be a Soul? that Embryos Breath not is demonstrable. If it be said, in Apoplexies, &c. there's Life, but no Breath, it's as easily answered, that 'tis a mistake, for there is Breath, tho' so Languid as not to be discern'd.

Ans. We have discoursed largely on several Questions of this Nature, in one of our Mercuries not long since published, which we desire the Querist to consider, tho' we won't wholly refer him to what has been already said. But whether that, or this, or both should fail of giving entire Satisfaction, the best is, that neither our Religion, nor so much as Philosophy does depend on things of this nice Nature. Both Reason and Revelation tell us that Man is made up of Soul as well as Body, and that this Soul must be Immortal, and Philosophy, and even common sense satisfy us, that Man begets a Man, that is, so disposes the matter that wherever there's a true Generation the Soul is United to it: Tho' no wonder if there be some difficulties in explaining the How and the When — and should there be something, which neither Philosophers nor Divines could certainly answer, as to the manner of the Souls Operation in the Body, before the Birth of the Infant, (indeed we may add afterward too) twou'd be no great wonder, since even the manner of Generation it self, wherein there have been so many millions of Experiments made in all Ages, is yet so much in the dark, and even the Ovarium which is now taken for granted by most Anatomists, with Keckringius, is yet as positively deny'd by others — and since there are so many different Opinions on this head, and that too, most often grounded on almost equally probable arguments. To come now to the present difficulty. The Souls of Abortives, wherever there's a real Conception, must be of the same Nature with the Souls of those Infants which are born alive, for the Abortion is but an accidental difference: But these have a Rational Soul, therefore so must the others. If they have the same soul before they are born, which they have afterwards, it must be Rational — for that we have Rational Souls is prov'd as plainly as that we have Life by the indubitable effects thereof, and those Souls Spiritual too, for nothing but what is Spiritual can properly reason. Now if we have Rational Souls

after we are Born, (which none can deny without calling himself Brute, whether he will or no) we think the consequent is easily prov'd that we must have such before: For this Rational Soul must be infus'd, (generated it can't be) either before the Birth, or in the Birth, or after it: not after it, which we suppose none will assert, for then the Infant wou'd not be of the same Species with its Parents: Not in the Birth, for undoubtedly its Species was determin'd before 'twas Born. Now to the Objection, which shoots beyond the mark, and therefore does no injury, (tho' we shall anon find it gives good aim to find out the Truth.) "That Infants before Birth seem to have only Vegetative Souls, because as soon as the Breath has left an Animal, the Soul is fled; therefore before a Creature breaths, how can it be present, &c." We answer first, there are other Properties of Animals besides Breathing, to instance in Sensation & Locomotion. This Infants have before they are Born, as none deny, not only suddenly starting, & feeling either Joy, or Pain, but sensibly moving themselves, nay turning them from side to side, in their little Bed, and changing their Posture for greater ease. Now if they have these two Incommunicable Properties of Animals, we may well conclude they have the third, or something at least that's equivalent to it, tho' we shou'd not be able distinctly to assign it, which yet we think we can do: In order to which we must inquire into the Reason of Respiration, which we are inclin'd to think is not so much, if at all, as your Old Folk used to tell us, ad Refrigerium Pulmonum, to fan or cool the Lungs, as to swell and distend the small Branches of the Wind pipe, by the Air taken in, that the Blood which out of the right Ventricle of the Heart, is propell'd into the Lungs may pass into the Left, it being from thence that the Ramifications of the Arterial Vein, thro' which the Blood must pass, are compress'd, and the Blood there inclos'd protruded into the Branches of the Venal Artery. Now instead of this, all Animals while they are in the Womb have peculiar ductus's, by which the Blood passes into the Aorta without passing into the Lungs, — which is equivalent to respiration. As for Adam, the case is not the same with him, and Infants as to actual Breathing. Besides there must be something Metaphorical necessarily granted in that Expression. "God Breathed into him the Breath of Life. Nothing but an Animal properly Breathes, but it's expressed according to our capacity, however, 'tis certain that something Divine must be intended by that which is called the Breath of the Almighty, which he's not said to have Breathed into any other sensible Creature but Adam, tho' they had all the same Animal Life, — and what else can be meant thereby but a Ray of the Divinity,

a *Spiritual Substance*, a *Rational Soul*, which proceeds only from that *Father of Spirits*, and from whence we are called the *Offspring of God*.

But we have somewhat more to add on this *Head*. If there may be even an *Animal principle* in *Man*, when either not *sensible*, or but *weakly* so, why may there not? nay why not much rather, be a *Rational* too? since this latter is much more *subtle*, and only *acts* by *impress'd Species* as to any outward *Operation*? Further, there may be a *Principle*, or *Power of Reason*, as well as there is of *speech* in an *Infant*, before it be *reduc'd* into *Act*, which may for a while be hindred by the *Inability* of the external *Organs*—but none will say, without expecting to be *laugh'd* at for his pains, that there's any such *Power* or *Principle* in *Vegetables* or *meerly Sensibles*.

Quest. 2. Since we are taught to believe that *God* is *Impartial* in his *Benefits*, and that all *Men* upon the *Face of the Earth* are equally dear unto him, in his desire of their *Salvation*, and since most certainly there is but one true way of *Worship* that can please him, how will you prove to me by *Reason* that the *Scripture* is his *Word*, when we see how many and different *Interpretations* it suffers, whereas one wou'd think it shou'd be so *perspicuous* and *open*, that not the least *doubt* or *misprision* cou'd be made of any one particular in it, much less would that which he meant for the *preservation* of our *Souls*, prove an *Argument of Contention* and *Division*, and what he sent among us to teach us *Peace* and *Love*, involve us in *Rage* and *Enmity*?

Ans. For the reason we have to believe the *Scriptures* to be *Gods Word*, we refer the *Querist* to *Vol. 2d. No. Qu. 10.* And shall here proceed to answer his scruples about it. The many, and different *Interpretations* thereof, are no prejudice against, it for as the most *strait* and *exact rule* in the *World*, will appear *crook'd*, if beheld through a *wrong medium* so 'tis here; The *Fault* is not in the *Scriptures*, but in the *vitiated Judgments* or *Passions* of those *Men* who wrest 'em to their own *Damnation*. For the *Diversity* of *Opinions* 'tis the cause of, this is only an *accidental effect*, and so may and does *accidental Evil* proceed from even other effects, of the *chiefest Good*—for no doubt *Sin* had never been in the *World*, nor among the *Angels*, had not *God* made 'em both. He goes on "one wou'd expect it so *perspicuous* & *open*, that not the least *doubt* or *misprision* could be made of any one particular. Now this we believe is *Impossible*, for a *Man* may shut his *Eyes*, and pretend the *Sun* does not *shine*, because he can't see it, or impudently affirm the same with his eyes wide open— or be *accidentally blind*, and so not in a *capacity* of discerning it. Do we question *Acts of Parliament*, to be really the *Kings and Kingdoms Word*, because their meaning is sometimes *Disputed*? A lower Instance 'tis true, but yet coming fully up to the *objection*— Twill be urged, *God*

con'd have made 'em otherwise, --- it may be true, but then he must have made *Man* otherwise, and so made him not a *Man*, which he had not been if not *free* and *Rational*, and while so, he can neither be *compell'd* in his *Faith* nor *actions*. And being thus *free*, it's impossible any *proposition* can be form'd which is not in his *power Verbally*, at least to *deny*, & do this so long till at last he may really *doubt* of it, tho' never so *self-evident*, much more in what is only *reveal'd*. He may, he does *abuse Gods name*, every day, and what wonder if he does as much by his *Word*? We find those who, at least in words, *deny* his *very Essence*, and why should we admire that they do as much by his *Perfections*, or *Revelations*, and we may as well argue there is no *God*, no *Religion*, *Natural* or *Revealed*, because all these be *abused*, & made the *occasions*, or at least *pretences* of *confusion* and *discord*, as that the *Holy Scriptures* are not *Gods Word* for the same reason. We must look into the *Natural* and *direct tendency* of these *Sacred Writings*, and what they wou'd certainly produce, if their *directions* were *Practis'd*, (which 'tis our faults if they are not) if we'd make a right *Judgment* of 'em, and discern whether they are of *God*: Now nothing can be plainer, than that they every where press to *Peace*, and *Love*, and *Unity*; and, in the *Writings* of our *Saviour* and his *Apostles* especially, under whom *Revelation* was perfected, at least as far as a *Canon*, or *Rule of Life*, *meekness* and *forgiveness of Wrongs*, is recommended and required, with the greatest *promises* and *rewards*,--- and what can bear more legible marks of *Divinity*, than such *Writings*, as if they were follow'd would make *Man* so like *God*, and *Earth* little differing from *Heaven*? And that they are not so, we may e'ne thank our selves whatever is *fundamental* or *necessary* to *Salvation*, being plainly *describ'd* therein, and if instead of believing and *Practising* them, we will eternally quarrel about some little *shibboleths* which sometimes we find, but oftner make in them, let's have a care at once of *Injustice* and *Blasphemies*, and not find fault with them, but amend our selves according to those excellent *Rules* which are there given us.

Quest. 3. Whether *Universal Love* to all *Mankind*, *Innocence of Life*, and an entire *resignation* to the *Divine Will*, be not a certain *Evidence* of a *Good Man*, notwithstanding any seeming *Heterodox Opinions*.

Ans. We reply in the affirmative, if the case be fairly Stated, if those *Heterodox Opinions* such a Person holds, are but *seemingly* so, if he falls into, and remains in 'em out of *weakness*, not *Pride* or *Obstinacy*, and if they are not in *fundamentals*, as they will not be, if he has such an entire *resignation* to the *Divine Will*, for that will oblige him, not only to do and suffer whatever *God* requires, but also to believe what he *Reveals*.